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GOOD BAD GUY
CANADA'S BARRY PEPPER TALKS TRUE GRIT {page 23}

FIRST NOTICE

WHO FOUND OUT MARIAH IS HAVING TWINS? DISH {page 41}

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Weekend, December 17-19, 2010
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News worth sharing.

Oil. Win

▶ Nikolai Khabibulin of the Oilers makes a save Thursday at Rexall Place.

DALE MACMILLAN/GETTY IMAGES

Oilers double up Blue Jackets

Linus Omark opened the scoring for Edmonton with his first NHL goal as the Oilers defeated Columbus 6-3 Thursday night. Jordan Eberle tallied twice. Game recap, page 43.

Province to fund MS study

Controversial treatment banned in Canada {page 2}

Ciara has words for the haters

Singer aims to silence doubters with new album {page 32}

Mixed feelings on pipeline

- National Energy Board approves Mackenzie pipeline
- Watchdog attaches 264 conditions to decision
- Despite approval, some say project is dead

The National Energy Board's approval of the long-delayed Mackenzie natural gas pipeline has been heralded as both an economic boon to the people of the North and as an environmental blow to the region.

Northwest Territories Industry Minister Bob McLeod called the decision "an early Christmas present."

The lead partner on the project, Imperial Oil Ltd., was similarly pleased.

"It's a vital step. It's a significant step. It's a very positive step for the project," said Imperial spokesman Pius Rolheiser.

The proposed 1,220-kilometre Mackenzie pipeline would carry natural gas from near the coast of the Beaufort Sea in the N.W.T. to southern markets.

In 2007, Imperial estimated the project's cost at $16.2 billion.

And even with the energy board's decision, the pipeline's future is by no means certain, since the company has said it won't move on the project until at least 2018.

Stephen Hazell, who participated in the lengthy regulatory hearings on behalf of environmental group Sierra Club, likened the project to Monty Python's famous dead parrot sketch.

"If it's not deceased, it sure looks like it," he said.

"It's a good thing that the Mackenzie gas project is dead, because this decision is a real huge step backwards."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Minister: Headwinds

Energy Minister Ron Liepert said the Mackenzie project would benefit the province.

▶ The liquids-rich gas would supply Alberta's petrochemical industry and keep pipelines full, keeping costs down for producers. But he acknowledged there are headwinds.

▶ "Obviously with the supply that exists in North America today, and the price point, it's probably going to be a challenging decision to make," he said.

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On the web at metronews.ca

Parliament wraps for 2010 with parties still jockeying for position. Video at metronews.ca

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Holidays. World Vision

▶ Surprise the alpaca got acquainted with a silky rooster held by Sonya Steiner at city hall yesterday.

HEATHER MCINTYRE/FOR METRO

Gifts that keep on giving

The animals from Horse Sence Training and Petting Zoo, along with sheep, goats and donkeys, were on display next to the nativity scene to promote World Vision's Gift Catalogue, which consists of presents such as a dairy goat, which produces 250 litres of milk per year. Such a gift can produce lasting change in the world's poorest communities.

Province shelling $1M for MS study

Unproven liberation therapy uses angioplasty to open twisted or blocked veins in neck, spine

The Alberta government says it will spend $1 million to track results from people who have travelled out of the country for a controversial multiple sclerosis treatment not currently available in Canada.

Health Minister Gene Zwozdesky says the web-based study will help determine whether the province should proceed with a clinical trial of the so-called liberation procedure.

The therapy, first done in Italy, remains unproven, but that hasn't stopped MS patients from having the procedure in other countries based on anecdotal evidence that it helps.

Zwozdesky says he has heard from many people who have seen their conditions improve.

"They would tell you about some overwhelming, immediately positive results. The question becomes, are those results long lasting?" he told a news conference Thursday.

"We would like to find out what characteristics the people had that are going for this treatment and are they different than other patients with MS?" NEUROLOGIST TOM FEASY

"They will tell you, in some cases, they weren't able to walk more than a block and now they are walking up to 30 blocks. Again, short term maybe, long term hopefully. We'll have to judge that accordingly."

There are as many as 13,000 people in Alberta with MS. Neurologist Tom Feasy, dean of medicine at the University of Calgary, said researchers hope to hear from about 500 of them for the study.

"We are interested in those who haven't had it and aren't going, those who haven't had it but might be going and those who have had it and come back," Feasy said.

The study will be used to determine whether to move forward with clinical trials. Zwozdesky said the province is prepared to commit a further $6 million to that if need be.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Watch out for taxi bandits, city says

HEATHER MCINTYRE/METRO

▶ Balraj Manhas, president of the United Cabbies Association of Edmonton, says all taxi drivers should have a valid licence from the city, along with proper markings on the vehicle itself.

Not properly licensed drivers take advantage of holidays: Cabbie

HEATHER MCINTYRE
@METRONEWS.CA

When catching a lift home, make sure you are taking the right one.

The city issued a warning about bandit taxis Thursday, as more than 170 tickets have been issued so far this year.

"It's important to use the city cabs," said Phil Fearon, the city's chief livery officer. "This is what I would call a crime of opportunity."

Bandit taxis are unlicensed vehicles that tend to appear during busy times for the taxi industry.

"Bandit cabs take advantage during the holiday season," said Balraj Manhas, president of the United Cabbies Association of Edmonton. "They put a top light or meter in any personal car and (hang out) in the entertainment district between midnight and 3 a.m., especially on weekends."

With holiday parties every weekend to salute the festive season and university students celebrating the end of a semester, getting in an unlicensed cab is dangerous at any time, especially if you've been drinking and are perhaps less inhibited, officials said.

Taxis licensed by the city have a front licence place that says "Edmonton Taxi," followed by a four-digit number starting with the letter A. The driver's licence should be visible in the vehicle, and a company name and phone number should be on the outside of the vehicle's doors.

When asked what he would say to those who would rather take the first ride offered than wait half an hour for a proper taxi, Fearon said it's a tough call.

"I know people that have done that," he said of not waiting. "It's a very difficult call, but, think, you have no idea who that driver is."

Last year, 210 tickets were issued to bandit taxi drivers.

Steep fines

If you spot a bandit taxi, call 311.

- Fines for bandit taxi drivers can include $1,000 for not having a city taxi licence, $400 for not having a business licence and $250 for not having a taxi driver's licence.

Court denies Svekla appeal

Alberta's Court of Appeal has upheld the conviction of a prostitute killer for sexually assaulting a child.

Thomas Svekla had argued the ruling should be tossed out because the trial judge was biased against him and refused to grant a stay when police evidence was lost.

But the Appeal Court said the judge made no errors in reaching the verdict he did.

Svekla was convicted in March 2009 of sexually assaulting and touching a five-year-old girl in 1995.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

For more news, visit metronews.ca

It pays to hold out for a legit taxi

By using a legitimate, licensed taxi, residents can be sure that the driver has proper training, has submitted a police information check and driver's abstract to the city, that the vehicle has had regular safety inspections and that insurance will cover everyone in the event of an accident during the drive.

HEATHER MCINTYRE

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News in brief

More than 630 speeding violations

STREETS. Edmonton police say they recorded 632 speeding violations and 497 other traffic violations during Operation 24-Hours, a program that they ran from 7 a.m. Tuesday to 7 a.m. Wednesday.

"Our goal is to deter people from driving over the speed limit or at speeds that are unsafe for current road conditions," said Staff Sergeant Kerry Bates of the EPS Traffic Section.

Cops net guns, drugs in raid

BUST. Police EDGE Unit members seized two handguns, nine stun guns, 12 ounces of crack cocaine and 14 ounces of marijuana during a Monday raid at a home the area of 166 Avenue and 79 Street. METRO

CAMPAIGNS ALL ABOUT TIMING

Opinion

DJ KELLY
THE SCRUTINEER

The calendar hasn't even flipped to 2011 yet but the provincial parties are already busy lining up their election plans for an anticipated spring 2012 vote. And those tried and true methods for engineering election wins will once again be unfurled.

Sure those strategies have worked for many years, but 2012 is going to be an election unlike any Alberta has seen before. Not only do we have a real choice for the first time in 20 years, but how you campaign has changed a lot in the last 40 years. Heck, it's changed in the last two years.

The much-ballyhooed, game-changing Barack Obama electoral campaign of 2008 could not be replicated in 2012.

It's about the right campaign at the right time. It's something the Progressive Conservatives should be very concerned about.

Over the past 40 years they've gotten very, very good at campaigning. So good, in fact, it might be impossible to convince them that the strategies they've used in the past will be nowhere near enough to win the next election in familiar landslide fashion. It can even be argued that if the Wildrose Alliance figures out the new realities of 2012 first, the PCs probably won't even win.

So what will be different come the drop of the writ this time? With each passing month, the electorate becomes more informed and more connected.

Whether it be Facebook and Twitter, or a TV that lets you surf the Internet — or even just a younger generation coming of age weaned on Wikipedia-style accessibility to information — this is a different public than the parties pandered to last time around. Whoever uses these new tools to allow voters to share information the best will have an upper hand.

These tools also point towards an election being fought on a local level, similar to the way it was done a century ago. With bloggers playing an increasingly important role in provincial political punditry and citizens with the ability to share who they're voting for and why, the story doesn't always need to be about the leader. It can, and often will, be about the local candidate. Expect to see summer barbecues, community events and neighbourhood councils be the real battleground in 2012 as candidates get a lot more direct comparative time.

This should theoretically be a boon for the PCs, who have a relatively weak leader, and bad news for the Wildrose Alliance, who in Danielle Smith have a strong one.

But the Wildrose should not be blinded by tradition and may be much better poised to take advantage of these new realities.

The premier's chair awaits the party who does just that.

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HEATHER McINTYRE/METRO

▶ Maegan Byrt and Bryan Keller, executive director of St. Francis Xavier's hockey academy, faced off against one another in the annual Chix With Stix game.

Go, go, go Chix

- Students beat teachers in annual fundraising tilt
- $6,000 expected for Stollery Children's Hospital

For the first time in 10 years, the girls beat the teachers.

St. Francis Xavier High School held their 10th annual Chix With Stix event at Bill Hunter Arena, and members of the female hockey academy won 14-9.

"It's a little bit of payback," said Grade 11 student Maegen Byrt.

"Teachers can be a pain ... sometimes, so it's nice."

A total of 24 "chix" laced up the skates against 18 teachers.

Bryan Keller, executive director of the hockey academy, said the teachers have won eight times and tied once — and now, have also lost once.

HEATHER McINTYRE

Two bodies found, two murder charges

A 49-year-old Nampa man has been charged with two counts of first-degree murder following the discovery of two bodies near Falher, a town in the Peace Country area of Alberta.

Melody Chomiak, aka Perry, 45, and her daughter Jerica Bouchard, 20, were found dead in a rural home early Wednesday morning after RCMP and EMS responded to a 911 hang-up call.

Edward John Chomiak is currently in custody and, at the time of the alleged offence, was bound by conditions of a restraining order against his family.

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WikiLeaks founder released on bail

Assange heads to English country mansion ◗ Could potentially publish more leaked U.S. diplomatic cables ◗ Claims to have 250,000 in reserve

KIRSTY WIGGLESWORTH/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

▶ WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange holds up a court document for the media after he was released on bail outside the High Court in London, Thursday.

The once-elusive WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was freed on bail Thursday as Sweden pushes its case for extradition and the United States considers its own criminal charges over his website's release of secret information.

The silver-haired Australian emerged from London's neo-Gothic High Court building after a tense scramble to gather the money and signatures needed to free him.

Assange — who's been out of the public eye for more than a month — told supporters he would pursue his efforts to bring government secrets to light.

"It's great to smell the fresh air of London again," he said to cheers from outside the court. "I hope to continue my work."

Assange is now headed to Ellingham Hall, a 10-bedroom mansion about 195 kilometres northeast of central London that belongs to Vaughan Smith, a WikiLeaks supporter and founder of London's Frontline Club for journalists.

Assange will have to observe a curfew, wear an electronic tag and report to police — restrictions imposed by High Court Justice Duncan Ouseley.

WikiLeaks spokesman Kristinn Hrafnsson said Assange could continue coordinating the publication of leaked U.S. diplomatic cables, whose publication has angered U.S. government officials, embarrassed allies and nettled rivals. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Accusations

Assange is accused of rape, molestation and unlawful coercion.

- **Assange's lawyers** say the allegations stem from a dispute over "consensual but unprotected sex" and argue he has offered to make himself available for questioning.
- **Lawyer Gemma Lindfield,** acting for Sweden, said given Assange's nomadic lifestyle, there was "a real risk" he would flee.
- **But the judge** said when Assange arrived in Britain, he had asked his lawyers to contact police so they would know where he was.

Persecution a threat to world peace: Pope

FILIPPO MONTEFORTE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

▶ Pope Benedict XVI

Pope Benedict XVI said Thursday that Christians suffer more religious persecution than any other group, denouncing lack of freedom of worship as an "intolerable" threat to world security.

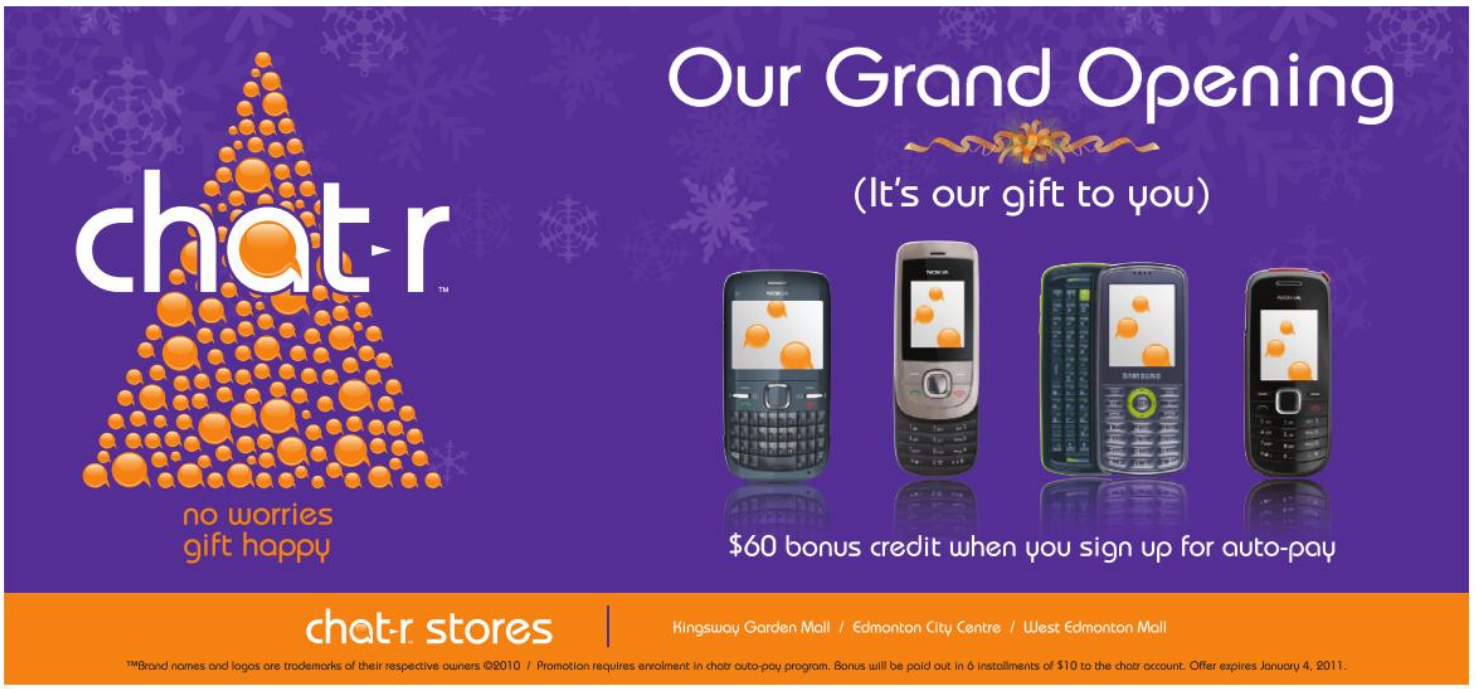
The message reflected a pressing concern by Benedict in recent months for the plight of Christian minorities in parts of the world, especially in the Middle East.

"Sadly, the year now ending has again been marked by persecution, discrimination, terrible acts of violence and religious intolerance," Benedict said in the message for World Peace Day, celebrated by the church on Jan. 1, but released in advance.

He wrote that he was especially thinking of Iraq. He singled out the "reprehensible attack" on a Baghdad cathedral during Mass in October, killing two priests and more than 50 other worshippers, as well as attacks on private homes that "spread fear within the Christian community and (create) a desire on the part of many to emigrate in search of a better life." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Israel's view

- **Israeli** Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor sympathized with the Pope: "The Christian presence is a blessing in Israel, and so it should be considered by other countries."



Kosovo PM blasts 'scandalous' report

In live TV address prime minister said he felt 'deeply offended' by allegations of organ-trafficking

FRANCOIS MORI/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

▶ Council of Europe investigator Dick Marty

Kosovo's Prime Minister Hashim Thaci said Thursday that a report suggesting he was the head of a criminal gang behind a grisly trade in the kidneys of slain civilian detainees was "monstrous" and "scandalous."

Thaci, who made his first public appearance since the publication of the report by Council of Europe investigator Dick Marty, said the allegations were aimed at damaging Kosovo's image internationally.

"The world knows who was the aggressor and who were the victims in Kosovo," Thaci said referring to crimes committed by former Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic against ethnic Albanians during the 1998-1999 war.

Marty's report, made public Tuesday, alleged that civilian detainees of the KLA rebels were shot to death to sell their kidneys on the black market and suggested Thaci was once the "boss" of a criminal underworld behind the trafficking. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

News in brief

U.S. will support UN indigenous bill

UN. U.S. President Barack Obama said Thursday that the United States will reverse course and support a United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous people.

The U.S. voted against the declaration when the General Assembly adopted it in 2007, arguing that it was incompatible with existing laws.

Canada, along with Australia and New Zealand, also opposed the declaration, but have since announced their support. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Police seize man's guns

WEAPONS CHARGES. Police in Dryden, Ont., have charged a man with weapons offences that investigators say stem from an investigation that started in Manitoba.

Det.-Sgt. Anne Tkachyk said officers seized long guns, handguns, switch-blade knives and high capacity magazines from a home Monday.

Is time running out to travel to The Netherlands' marijuana bars? Scan code for story.

She said 71-year-old Robert McGillivray faces 11 charges, including three counts of possession of a prohibited weapon.

McGillivray is due in court Feb. 7. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Ex-premier dies at 83

MANITOBA. Former Manitoba premier Sterling Lyon has died after a short illness.

Lyon's family said in a statement that he died Thursday morning in Winnipeg's Grace Hospital.

Lyon, who was 83, became Manitoba's 17th premier in 1977 and served one term as head of a Progressive Conservative government. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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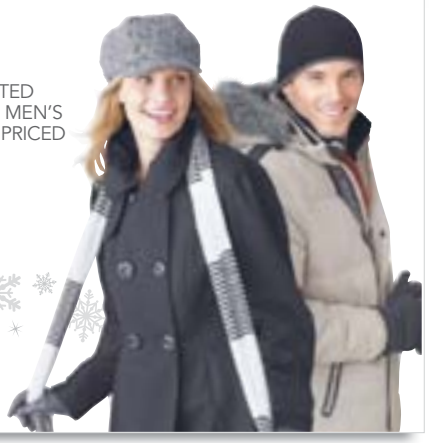

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